



Democrats Hit GOP on Taxes

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Party Seeks to Upend Stereotype

Tired of being painted as tax-and-spend liberals, House Democrats today will launch what they say is a long-term political offensive to highlight how GOP policies have hurt the middle class and put the nation deeper in the red.

Led by Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), House Democrats will use tax-filing week as the kickoff for their latest initiative. Hoyer said Tuesday that Democrats will attempt to show in the coming days and months that they are the true "party of reform" and that, despite the GOP rhetoric, Republicans have only made the tax system more complicated and unjust.

"Democrats can talk about taxes in a way that will connect with people [so] they will know that Democrats really are talking about making it fairer and simpler for them and their families," Hoyer said. "We're going to keep hitting the facts that the government is bigger under Republicans and deficits have soared as a result of their tax policies and spending policies."

The minority party will begin the effort today by unveiling a report outlining what it views as five major failures of recent Republican tax policies.

The analysis, prepared by Ways and Means Committee Democrats, focuses on "greater unfairness" in the tax code, an "exploding national debt," "increased complexity" in the system, an expansion of the reach of the Alternative Minimum Tax and the emergence of "more losers than winners" in the estate tax repeal.

"Republicans have done the opposite of what they said they would do," said Dan Maffei, spokesman for Ways and Means ranking member Charlie Rangel (N.Y.). "They are resting on withered laurels in terms of reducing taxes on working American families."

Ron Bonjean, spokesman for Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), said the public will see through the minority's latest political move. He called on Democrats — who he said consistently vote against tax cuts — to "put the tax relief where your mouth is."

"Democrats have voted thousands of times for higher taxes," Bonjean said. "The Democrats' foundation is to raise taxes. There's no secret about that."

The release of the report coincides with this week's plan by House Republicans to repeal the estate tax and broadly highlight how their policies — including changes to bankruptcy and class-action law — have improved the nation's economy. Republicans said the Democratic initiative is hollow given that the economy continues to surge, markets are improving and jobs are increasing.

"You are seeing the tangible benefits of this tax relief," said Greg Crist, spokesman for the House Republican Conference. "I can't think of a better time than on tax day to bring that to light."

Crist added that Republicans have successfully cut taxes for all Americans and continue to push for a better, simpler system. He said the public knows the GOP is the party of "tax relief, tax fairness and tax simplification and that will be evident this week."

"It's hard to imagine Democrats getting any traction on this," he said. "They are swimming upstream on this issue, and that's not going to change any time in the near future."

But Democrats argue that once the facts are presented, they will change the perception that Republicans are stronger on tax reform and tax cuts. They added this is a chance for Democrats to try to steal away a long Republican-held issue, just as the GOP has attempted to do with reforms to Medicare, education and Social Security policies. Former President Bill Clinton also scored points in the 1990s by seizing on such Republican-leaning issues as welfare reform.

"Just like they've tried to turn our traditional issues on us, we're trying to turn one of their traditional issues on them," said one Democratic leadership aide.

Rep. Earl Pomeroy (N.D.), who will help lead House Democrats on the estate tax debate, charged that Americans are getting hit by flawed Republican policies that cause greater confusion in the tax system, as well as financial burdens and booming deficits. He added that the GOP has served a bill of goods to the middle class.

"It's catching up with the Republicans," Pomeroy argued. "These guys are great at marketing, but the American taxpayer is learning the reality."

Hoyer and Rep. Richard Neal (Mass.), a Ways and Means member, are sending out a "Dear Colleague" letter to Members on tax reform, telling them that they must turn up the heat on Republicans and "seize the offensive on this issue and advocate for changes that make our tax code simpler, fairer and responsible."

"The GOP uses complexity to mask the true impact of the laws they have written," the two Democrats wrote. "Democrats must not let them get away with it. Moreover, we should not play defense on the issue of tax reform."

House leaders are asking Members to take the tax report to their districts, hoping they will use its message points about Republican policies. They are also calling on Members to take to the floor during debates and during special orders this week to ramp up the rhetoric on the issue.

Hoyer said that Democrats plan to make tax reform a top priority this Congress, similar to what they have done with Social Security. He said Democrats "will keep hitting the facts" to break through, and will enlist all Members to repeat the message.

"We have to just not get discouraged and not get dissuaded," Hoyer said of the long-term effort. "We have to keep our eye on the prize, which is the message that we are for making [the tax code] simpler and more fair."

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